

THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWNE

CHAPTER XX.

The day was far advanced; still the afternoon sun shone and glared on the hot and dusty roads of Surrey, and upon a tired horse and driver as they drew up in front of the west lodge of Baron Court.

"Stop here!" cried the voice of an old man whose venerable head appeared at the cab window. "The horse is so weary it would be a shame to drive it farther. I will walk the rest of the way. It is not far, is it?" he inquired of the lodge keeper.

"No, sir, not if you take the short cut across the park; but I will accompany you and carry your bag for you."

"Thank you kindly," returned the old gentleman as he paid the cabman his fare. "I shall be glad of your company."

The younger man seized the bag and walked slowly, endeavoring to keep pace with the older man's feeble steps, wondering all the while upon what errand the reverend and white-haired old visitor could be bound.

The deer and cattle were herded at the more shady side of the park, and, except for the song of the birds, a deathlike stillness prevailed around.

"You have sustained a great loss recently, I fear?" asked the old man kindly.

"A terrible loss, your reverence. This morning the remains of the kindest of masters were laid to rest in the old family vault. There will be great changes soon, we fear. We shall not see his like again. He had been ill a long time, but death came suddenly at the end, and his family were scarcely prepared for it. Some of them have taken it badly."

"Ah!" said the old priest, "I feared it would be so, and he leaped into his carriage."

The path from this lodge brought them upon the west wing of the Court, and it was well in view ere the old man raised his eyes and observed it.

"Are you expected, sir, may I ask?"

"No," he said, shaking his head solemnly, as he looked at the handsome pile of buildings in front. "No, I am not expected."

"Well, sir, pass through this side gate, and follow the broad road; it will lead you full in front of the Court, and you will see the steps leading to the entrance door; ring the bell; some one will soon come in answer to it, and I will send your bag in at the back. Good-day, sir," and he touched his hat respectfully.

Old Father Egbert trudged along, past the dark, silent windows, and bright, gorgeous flower beds, and a sound but the shuffling of his own feet upon the light gravel walk to be heard. He looked a grand picture of nobleness and simplicity as he mounted the marble steps, his benevolent old head bent in serious thought, his long white silky hair brushed back from his fine open countenance, his heart full of charity and pity for a soul he loved.

The bell pealed loudly through the great vaulted hall, and in speedy answer to its summons a footman in a sombre livery appeared. He started at the apparition of the old man, but his gaze, and though against orders, instinctively fell back and permitted the visitor to enter.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, gravely saluting the old priest, "but I must inform you that the family is in great grief at present."

"The young lady?" inquired the old man, his eyes kindling as he spoke.

"She is the worst of all, sir, and refuses to see any one."

"Do not disturb any other member of the family at present, but lead me to Lady Beatrice's apartments. My business is with her."

The man hesitated; but there was that about the old priest which demanded obedience, and he yielded reluctantly.

Silently they passed up the broad staircase and along the softly carpeted passages, the servant leading the way, and wishing heartily that they could meet some one, or that he had not been the one to answer the bell. The old priest followed slowly and deliberately.

"I understand that it is the young lady you wish to see, sir?" said the man, turning and confronting the guest; "but let me tell you that she is in the room in which our poor master died, and no one can rouse her out of it; besides which, she has issued the strictest orders that no one is to be admitted, for she will not see them."

"Poor child," said the old man, with great feeling and tenderness. "But if this is her room you may leave me. I am an old friend, and she will see me, for I have come far to visit her."

"I believe you, sir, but trust all the same that I shall not get into trouble for showing you up."

"Never fear," was the firm rejoinder. "It is all my fault, not yours. I am the priest from St. Basil's, where your young mistress was at school. You can inform these young gentlemen I am here, but ask them not to disturb us for a short time. I know she would be in grief, and have come to aid her, as I promised her I would."

The tone and manner of the old priest carried conviction with them; besides, the likeness of Father Egbert hanging in the young lady's boudoir dispersed all doubt from the question, and, bowing politely, he left the old man to his own devices.

Turning the handle softly but firmly, the priest entered the darkened room and closed the door behind him. Everything appeared so dim, that for a few seconds he paused, unable to discern the objects before him. Then, shading his eyes with his hands, he saw lying upon a couch, with her back towards him, the object of his search. "Was she asleep?" he wondered. How still she lay!

Crossing the room softly, he drew a chair close to the couch, and bent over the well-remembered form. The gold-brown head, looking more golden than ever by contrast with the heavy black dress, rested helplessly on a handsomely embroidered cushion; her face was deathly pale, the bright eyes were half closed, and across the pretty features the painful line of suffering was drawn; her lips were parted and parched; the whole attitude of the body spoke of abject grief and misery indulged in beyond control.

She lay as one stunned, and for some moments the priest looked down upon her, a yearning pity filling his heart the while. But stern duty spoke at last, and he earnestly set himself to the task of rousing her.

"Beatrice," he said sadly but sternly, "is it thus I find you, my child?—you, in whom I had such faith, such confidence. Arise, and give way to this no longer."

The voice stirred her; she started as though awakening from a deep sleep, and pressed her hands wildly to her temples.

"Beatrice, do you not hear me?" he continued, in the same firm voice. "I command you to rise! What right have you to rebel like this?"

"What right!" she repeated mechanically. "Why should I care to live? He—he is dead! Who is it that speaks to me thus?"

"One who demands your obedience, my child; turn and look at him!"

She opened her eyes, but was too prostrate to move. "Speak again," she said, "I love the voice; it carries me back to happy days of long ago."

Seeing a decanter of wine upon a table near, Father Egbert poured some out, and handed it to her. "Drink this, Beatrice, then turn and face me."

She did both; then, overcome with joy at the welcome but unexpected sight which met her feeble gaze, she seized the old man's hands, and in an ecstasy of joy and sorrow burst into a flood of tears, the first she had shed since her father's death. He stroked the small cold hands, and stroked the weary face, allowing her to weep unrestrainedly. Life and circulation were gradually returning to her.

"Father, Father!" she cried, "how good of you to come! I feel so weak and ill, that I know not what is the matter with me."

"Alas, my child, you have brought much of this upon yourself, and it grieves me to see you thus. I had hoped for better things from my little Beatrice than this."

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed again.

"It is selfish grief alone that so prostrates you, my child. Instead of submitting to the decrees of Heaven, and endeavoring to comfort those around you, I find you rebelling against God, and sullenly refusing to Him the sacrifice He demands."

"But, Father, dear Father, do not condemn me unheard. He asks so much—indeed He does. You don't know all He seeks."

"Fortunate child, that He should deign to ask from you at all. Be wiser, my child, and refuse Him."

"Help me," she said, struggling hard against herself—"help me, and I will try to give."

"Ah! there speaks my old Beatrice once more. I feared she was dead to all that once made her so noble and generous. Now tell me, child, what it is that so overpowers you? what it is He demands, and that which you cannot give?"

"Listen!" said the girl wearily, taking the old priest's hand in hers. "He has taken my father, who was dearer to me than any one else in the world, and now He claims my darling brother Percy."

"But how—what do you mean?"

"He is going to leave us and enter the priesthood; he told my poor father so, and he is going soon."

"Thrice happy youth," murmured the old man, "to be able to give himself so generously. What an example for you! But you have still much left, my child—more a great deal than many," and he thought of poor Madge.

"Oh, but that is not all!" she moaned piteously. "I cannot tell you the rest, for I do not even wish to think of it. Why should it come to me?"

"Why, indeed?" he said, as if to himself. "Why should Heaven shower its choicest favors upon one so utterly unworthy of them, and who knows not how to value them, aright? Alas, that I should have been so bitterly disappointed in you!" and the old man bowed his head, as if he were the culprit, and was overpowered by the thought of his own unworthiness.

"Father, Father, have pity upon me! I do not speak thus to you. You know not what I have suffered!" she cried, her whole frame quivering with a powerful emotion she could not control.

disappointment, his face buried in his hands.

"Dear, dear Father Egbert," she pleaded, and sank heavily upon her knees beside him. "I have hurt and wounded you. Speak words of hope and encouragement to me, as you ever did of old, for I am dreadfully miserable. I have done wrong. I feel, I know I have. Help me to amend."

He could not withstand this appeal. Gently he placed his hand upon the shoulder of the trembling girl beside him. Accustomed to read hearts, he read her inmost soul as an open book before him. Whilst too weak to kneel, she sank in a sitting posture upon the floor, her head resting upon the couch, listening in sorrow and remorse as he pictured to her in moving and eloquent language her unfaithful conduct towards God. Nor did he spare her. The evening shadows lengthened, and the song of the birds was hushed and still, the setting sun glistened through the chinks of the drawn blinds, and fell upon the form of the old man as he sat, his figure bent tenderly towards that of the penitent girl at his feet. The thought of that evening three years ago, when, in the pride of her girlhood, she had knelt and listened to Lady Abbe's last words of farewell, of how she had remembered with her, and failed to understand her, words of admonition and advice; and then how well she remembered that prophetic reply, "Not now, Bertie, but when the time comes, you will understand what I mean, and know then how to act."

No one knew better than herself how she had fought and struggled against that knowledge; how she had sought and striven to crush and still that small and voice which day by day, and most of all during the silent hours of the night, had pursued her with unremitting and ceaseless persistence, always in the same sad and earnest refrain—"My child, give Me thy heart."

"For I have loved thee with a love No mortal heart can show; A love so deep, my saints in heaven Its depths can never know, Vain are thy offerings, vain thy sighs, Without one gift divine; Give it, My child, thy heart to Me, And it shall rest in Mine!"

Oh, why had she not yielded sooner? If such life-long peace and joy was to be hers as was portrayed by the burning and eloquent words of the old man beside her, and which she knew and felt were true, why had she begrudged God the poor gift of her heart? For whom or what was she reserving it? Would any one ever understand it as she did? What made it? Was she so entirely dead to the feeling of generosity as not to be able to value at its true worth the behavior of her brother Percy? No, no; she knew well that she had a mind, a soul above it all.

Father Egbert had drawn from her eyes the veil wherewith she had sought to blind her soul to what she knew was right, and in its place had exposed to her dazzled view heights and wonders wherewith she felt her own heart could alone revel and rejoice.

And so heart to heart they talked, the moments flying as seconds, whilst, as a spirit and faithful child, she told him of all her faults and shortcomings, and listened to his words of encouragement and advice. Several times had Percy stolen gently to the outside door and listened, but could distinguish only the low murmur of their voices; so, as gently he withdrew, greatly comforted. He would not disturb them. Surely it must be in answer to his dear Father's prayers that this old man had been sent to bring peace and rest to his little sister's soul.

They rose at last, each supporting the other; he tottering and feeble from old age and exhaustion; she weak and prostrate from all she had endured. Yet in her heart burned a bold and strong purpose, and Heaven helping her, she would be true to it. She would be dead to that voice no longer. It alone should lead and guide her future life.

The old man tarried but one day to rest, and then returned to his own country. God had blessed his endeavors. "He had raised the broken, weeping girl from her mistaken grief and torpor, and guided her young steps upon the path of duty and honor. A Higher Power and her own exertions must complete the rest."

The high and generous soul of the girl had at last been touched and stirred to life again. She was not one to give by halves, and from henceforth her life must be different. No more useless grief for the parent she had lost; only bitter regret that by her selfish conduct she had rendered his death and parting from her so much harder than it might have been. "He knows now the true value of all earthly things," and she would whisper to herself, "and he shall see how his little Bertie can afford to despise them, and how zealously she will endeavor to live as he would have wished her to."

Time, that healer of all wounds, passed on, and Lady de Woodville marvelled as she saw how rapidly the spirits and health of her daughter returned to her. She would have marvelled still more, ay, and murmured also, had she but faintly guessed the cause of that secret which of joy in the girl's heart, spring of generous resolves and purposes. She did not at all approve of her second son's desire to become a priest, and to her he seldom spoke of it. Only to his sister he poured out his soul's thoughts and wishes, and between them a closer and nearer bond than

ever seemed to exist; and though the girl seldom spoke of herself, yet she knew and felt that he understood her thoroughly.

Forget her father she never could. It was the constant thought of him, and doing honor to his memory, that spurred her on to live and act as she felt and knew would have pleased him best, and with a nature like hers the task was not after all so very difficult. By a powerful effort she strook of the heavy torpor that had for so long cramped and overpowered her, and, with health and energy restored, took fresh interest in all around.

Her mother, gratified and pleased beyond measure when she witnessed the beauty and attractions of her daughter return almost redoubled, matured many a high and scheming plan regarding the child's future. Such beauty, talent, and accomplishments could not pass unnoticed. Society would ring with her praises. The girl was destined for a high career; and, when the weary season of mourning was over, Beatrice must make good use of her time. So planned the mother, but far from the daughter's heart were any such thoughts as these.

The young Earl, who was from home at the time of her father's death, but had now returned. He bore his new dignities well, as became the high position he held, and took up his new responsibilities with a serious energy that surprised every one. Perhaps a shade more reticent and reserved than ever, he had, yet, lost much of that haughty and overbearing manner which so characterized his previous life. He appeared to understand and to appreciate his younger brother much more than he had ever done before, and was most kind and courteous towards his sister. To his mother he was ever considerate and dutiful. If he had a secret sorrow or disappointment in his heart, no one knew it, few ever guessed at it; nevertheless it did exist, and was rarely ever absent from his mind. It grew and fostered until he came to look upon it as a sacred thing, too sacred to be exposed to any human ear save one. And would she ever listen to it? Ah, in that lay the pain of it!

The night before Percy's departure for the Novitiate found the brother and sister arm-in-arm, pacing for the last time up and down their favorite walk in the wood. The boy—for such he always was to her—was unfolding to her all his aspirations and desires for the future, little thinking that every word he uttered fired the enthusiasm of the girl beside him, and made him appear as a hero, worthy not only of admiration but of imitation also. With what pride did she not look up to him now; and for his sake she would bear up, so that the parting from home should be made easy. Later on they stood in front of the picture which she had given her that Christmas Day, when all others had lavished jewels upon her. "Do you like it, Bertie?" he asked, fixing his eyes earnestly upon it.

She put her arms around his neck, and, hiding her face upon his shoulder, replied in a whisper, as though afraid of being overheard, "I love it more than any treasure I possess."

He held her from him and looked into the depths of her eyes for one moment, then hissing her, said glancingly, "God bless you, my little sister," and, though his words were few, his meaning was deep.

In spite of herself, she drooped after he had gone, for she missed his merry and cheerful companionship; yet in her heart she would not have had him back, but looked forward with pride to his future.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE ORGAN GRINDER

By Kenton Grange in The Missionary

The following story is another one of the tales told by Father Dupont, on board the S. S. Touraine. The year was 1917, and we were coming from France to America:

The terror and dread of the War Zone had been passed. A magic sky of opal, studded with myriads of sparkling stars, enshrouded the night. We seemed to be moving on the crest of some mystic and underground lake, under the bewitching light of a full moon, the great waters stretched to the far horizon in pectoliteness and tranquility; a symbol of the Eternal. There was something in the silence and restful calm that one could not associate with this workaday world of worry and we. We were in some wonderful land of romance. If Aladdin had pushed back the clouds of night and had appeared upon the sky line, backing us into the dreamlands of the Arabian Nights, I believe, not one of us would have felt surprise. The whole atmosphere breathed of enchantment and mystery.

Seated at the end of the promenade deck was Father Dupont. As we passed him, someone suggested that a night like this was a night for a good story. When we reposed, we stopped and asked Father Dupont to tell us another story.

The good priest was willing. In his humble way, he asked us to listen to the tale of his life. "I will tell you this story in the way it happened, with all its details and also with all the observations and speculations which its main character made upon American life. They may be of interest and also a source of study for some of you." With these few remarks Father Dupont began his story:

What I am about to relate, gentlemen, happened about eight years ago in a big Western city. Its name is of no importance. I will call my tale, 'The Story of the Organ Grinder,' because the whole anecdote deals with an Italian and a street organ.

It was a wet, bleak night in early spring. The cold breath of winter could be felt in the chilly wind that swept down the street. Black, ominous clouds drifted across the sky, and the sickly glare of the street lamps shone down upon streets covered with mud and melting snow.

I had just finished supper when the maid informed me that someone wished to speak with me at the door. "Why the door?" I asked. She replied that "it was my Italian with his street organ. He had something very important to say to me and would not come in." I got up and went out to the door. There, standing in the dripping rain, with his medical bag under his arm, was an Italian beggar whom I had many times befriended.

The first time I had seen him he had aroused my sympathy. He somehow lacked the usual characteristics which distinguish these waifs of the streets from other types of mendicants. I had met him many times on my walks, both on the busy thoroughfares and on deserted waysides. Standing with his old brown slouched hat, a thread worn coat of gray that covered a blue shirt, a pair of ragged corduroy trousers that seemed to be trying to hide a tattered pair of shapeless shoes, and a handkerchief of many colors around his neck in place of a collar, the poor unfortunate had never ceased to have my sympathy. Cranking out a tin rattle of some popular song with one hand, holding on with the other to a chain, at the end of which gambled and performed an ugly little monkey with a red coat and wearing a dirty little skull cap of the same color, he presented a picture which was the personification of the pathetic. The whole scene was a sketch of life out of harmony with creation. Here was a man, born for the blue skies and the sleepy silence of Italian vineyards, striving to earn a living as a beggar, amid the dust and the roar of an American city.

Once I had taken him to the reformatory and given him something to eat. From that day I never failed to give him a coin as he passed down my way.

"Good evening, friend," I said to him, wondering if the poor fellow had got stranded.

"Good evening, Fatha," he replied. "Me wants speak to you," he continued in that dull accent peculiar to the Italian tongue. "Me come in my face, looking saggily into my face. Letta me bring in ma box, too?"

Feeling sorry for the poor soul, I nodded assent. With an awkward bashfulness, he took his aged dirty hat off, and with much pushing and blundering, finally managed to get his organ and himself into the office.

When he got seated I asked him where his monkey was.

"Fatha, me goin' to tella a story. Me no what you think to be. Will you listen?"

Seeing again in his big red tanned face, set off with a thick, heavy black moustache and crowned with a big fluffy black curl, something that told of a higher training; for you may have your own ideas of life, gentlemen, and your own philosophies, but outside the things of Heaven, to which we all are heirs, all men are not born equal; there is a stamp on some men, the stamp of a higher order, a stamp wrought out by centuries of training, a stamp which is in the blood and which is the inheritance of greatness, a stamp which can be recognized and which must be acknowledged. I saw something of that stamp in the countenance of my visitor, the organ grinder.

That night, and feeling that although he was clothed in rough and mud-spattered clothing, he was my equal and perhaps my superior in the world's ranks, I told him that I would be delighted to listen to his story.

He placed his wet, slouching hat on the table, and unfastening his musical box he laid it carefully on the floor. Leaning forward, with his fingers crossed between his knees, he told me the following tale:

I will not attempt to tell it in his half-broken English. I will narrate it, however, as he told it to me, forgetting not his remarks, as I said, "they may be useful to some of you."

Father, I am not what I appear to be, I belong to a noble and wealthy family, which has a beautiful ancestral home, nestling in a little town that stands in the shadows of the Northern Apennines. Twenty-five years ago I married the pretty daughter of a wealthy Florentine merchant. The world at that time was for me a wonderful place to live in. My children grew up and I was happy. If ever God was good to any of His children, He was good to me then.

My happiness was so perfect that it did not seem to be earthly. It frightened me. I dreaded the future. Somewhere in those days that lay ahead I felt that there was a thunderbolt that would wreck the place of my joy. This foreboding haunted my peace of mind. My contentment, at times, was dimmed by its shadow.

Our eldest son grew up. Contrary to my unexpressed desires and my dearest wishes, intentions he chose a worldly career. For us, the Church had been our dream. The study of art was his choice. God had gifted him with a great love for the beautiful. I may add that He also had

bestowed upon him the remarkable power to portray that love. However, we tried to show him that in God's Church he would have a chance to develop that love and even to know more about it and to appreciate it more. But our words were of no avail. He wanted to become an artist. We concealed our disappointment and sent him to the greatest masters in Rome and Vienna. We gave him all the encouragement we could. His genius was early noticed in the schools. The great masters predicted for him a great future. In fact, many looked to him to be the founder of a new school, to be the interpreter of the age.

The summer that was to see the end of his studies came around. Everything was ready for his departure. The little village had agreed to honor him. In a word, we were all proud of his achievements.

One morning a letter was handed into my office. It was an end of our dream. Francesco had fled to America. His letter asked for forgiveness. It begged that his name be forever remembered in our prayers. If upon earth we were never to meet again, at least we might meet in Heaven. And no matter what befell him in life, he would still dream through the years to come of that little home of terraces and gothic arches that nestled at the foot of the white peaked Apennines, and which he once called home. It would be for him a remembrance to cherish all through the years.

The blow shattered our happiness. My wife's health yielded to its violence. Shortly afterwards my investments failed. Then two of my children died. I gave up all idea in the goodness of God. I felt that if He did exist He must have been shielding me in a fool's paradise. Trials I had expected, but never such a catastrophe. Its blow blasted away every reason for my existence. God and faith could not be. I gave up all belief in both.

On inquiring at the schools of study I learned that my son had been drawn into the "fast set" of the place. His work had deteriorated. He had failed in some prize he had been sure of gaining. And finally he had become implicated in some stabbing affair, for which he was wanted by the police.

Rather than bring insult and dishonor by appearing in court, he had fled to America.

We waited on word from America. Two months after his flight it came, a soiled envelope, with a sheet of grease stained paper. It told us that he was well and that he was going to try and wipe out his disgrace. He asked us to forgive him, and in tearful language begged his mother to pray for him.

We answered that letter. No answer ever came back. Months went by and still my wife grieved for the lost one. For myself, my soul hardened. All play and love for the things of God had left my heart. In their place a frozen cynicism reigned. Life became a game of chance. My turn was over. To rebuild was useless. Why raise a little ant hill in this whirling bedlam, that when examined in the rain of space was simply a dot in the universe? Why toil and sweat to corner an atom of golden dust from the surging eddies of gold in which the world loves to play? Why try to reconstruct, when the heel of some powerful joker was ready to crush it down again? What joy could there be in the vision of completion? Destruction awaited it all. Even if it did not come, there was always the changing whim of the joker. Against this we were powerless. I had been the joke once. His deadly irony and its flash torturing lash, its blating satanic completeness once felt, the victim would ever remember it. Life was too short and precious to endure it twice. I had been the world's fool, the idiot of Destiny, the dancing toy of Fate. Once was enough. Henceforth, I would be a spectator. I would stand in the ring and watch the Great Foe. And I would laugh with the sublime joker. I felt I had a right to the comedy of Existence. I had paid the price, the price the creation of Chance had asked throughout the ages. Life was a laugh. It was really funny when you understood its tricks. And so I laughed, and in my laugh was the echo of Hell.

My soul withered under the cancer of Despair.

One afternoon in summer an old priest, a friend of the family, paid us a visit.

I explained to him all my troubles and my new outlook upon life. With a silent patience he heard me through. And when I ceased to speak he said, "So that is all?" "Yes, that is all. And what more could there be?" was my answer.

"Son," he replied, "did your Faith teach you that you were created for this world?" I angrily retorted, "No, nor did it teach me that this world was Hell—because Hell it has been for me. All your wonderful talks are all right when everything is going all right."

"My son, this world is not Hell. You have made it Hell yourself. What use would there be of Heaven if this world gave you all you wanted? You did not complain against Him when He gave you those happy days in the past. It is easy to love God when the old earth smiles upon you. There is no merit there. Now that God is testing you, you place your little tiny intellect along side His; you even put it on a scale above His, and you practically say to Him: 'I know I was made for the world of eternity, and that this little blaw is only a stepping stone to the land of God. I know all this, but I

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